

Executive Summary

Purpose and Scope

Transportation is a critical issue in King County and the surrounding region, affecting quality of life and the economy. Aging roads and bridges, tight budgets, changing communities, and increasing traffic require the Road Services Division to plan facilities and services with exceptional care and efficiency. The King County Comprehensive Plan 2000 calls for the division to develop a new transportation plan that identifies and prioritizes road needs over the next several years. The Roads Strategic Plan is the first step in this process.

This new functional plan focuses on the delivery of road facilities and services. It is consistent with, and expands on, the Comprehensive Plan, providing a bridge between the Comprehensive Plan's high-level policy guidance and the day-to-day practices, procedures, and decision-making of the Road Services Division. It highlights broad transportation goals, targeted strategies, and associated action steps, and will serve as an implementation guide for Comprehensive Plan transportation policies. The plan also articulates the division's regional roles, provides direction for prioritizing road projects, and provides guidance for decisions on spending transportation dollars. The Roads Strategic Plan is intended to be a practical, action-oriented guide for widely varied users, including county staff and management, elected officials, and the public.

The plan's development is the first phase of a two-part effort to update and enhance the division's transportation planning process. In the second phase (taking place in 2003-2004), the plan is guiding the creation of a new project prioritization process and a list of long-term transportation capital needs. The latter will become the county's new Transportation Needs Report, which will continue to fulfill the role of the county's long-term transportation capital facilities plan.

Process

This plan has emerged from a collaborative process and has been shaped by a broad range of informed perspectives. The project team included King County Department of Transportation staff members from the Road Services and Metro Transit divisions and the Office of Regional Transportation Planning. The team's expertise encompasses traffic and capital project engineering, maintenance, finance and budgeting, intergovernmental relations, environmental science, transit speed and reliability, and transportation planning. Other county agencies, including the Sheriff's Office, the former Office of Regional Policy and Planning, the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, and staff from the county's Historic Preservation Program, were consulted on various topics. Project team meetings,

topical working group sessions, conversations with experts, professional research, community advisory group meetings, public events, and a public survey have all contributed to the plan's recommendations. Public involvement was particularly important to the project. A summary of the public outreach process can be found in Appendix A of the plan.

Plan Recommendations

The plan is organized around eight themes derived primarily from the King County Comprehensive Plan and the Road Services Division's business plan. In the plan document, each theme is represented by a general goal statement and followed by a recommended set of strategies and associated actions.

While the division performs numerous activities vital to the functioning of the county's transportation system, the plan focuses only on an important subset of those activities—key functions that the division has identified as needing additional strategic guidance for division operations and/or additional guidance necessary to fully implement the Comprehensive Plan. As a result, the plan does not inventory, or make recommendations related to, all division functions.

The goals and strategic recommendations of the Roads Strategic Plan are summarized below. The themes are not organized in any priority order, and the number of strategies summarized under each theme does not necessarily reflect the topic's relative priority or importance. Topics may have numerous recommendations simply because the issue has never been dealt with comprehensively. Conversely, other important topics are not discussed in this plan because professional manuals or other county documents already provide sufficient guidance.

Regional Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership

Goal: Pursue regional leadership, coordination, and partnership to address county-wide transportation challenges.

The Road Services Division has two different yet complementary levels of responsibility for addressing transportation needs in King County. In unincorporated areas the division has direct, local responsibility for planning, designing, constructing, operating, and maintaining the public road system, excluding private roads and state highways. Beyond this, the county is one of many jurisdictions, including 39 cities and the Washington State Department of Transportation, that are responsible for various parts of a large, interconnected countywide road system. The division has an important role in helping to create a seamless regional transportation system that serves multi-modal users throughout the county and encourages efficient use of the roadway system. The division pursues regional projects through interlocal cost-sharing agreements and, when regional funding is available, through grants or other sources. The regional strategies and actions in the plan provide focus for these division activities.

Strategies:

- Expand participation in existing regional planning, coordination, and decision-making processes.
- Promote a multi-jurisdictional regional corridor approach to planning and projects.
- Lead, promote, and coordinate regional technology initiatives to reduce congestion.
- Coordinate regional use of traffic control centers to optimize use of existing roads.
- Coordinate with other jurisdictions on mutually beneficial programs (e.g., Endangered Species Act response).
- Support freight mobility and incorporate related criteria in project planning, prioritization, and implementation.
- Evaluate and consider addressing unmet regional transportation information needs.
- Minimize traffic disruption during local or regional road project construction.
- Build on contracting relationships between jurisdictions.

The Urban And Rural Road System

Goal: Plan, design, build, operate, and maintain the road system consistent with supporting and serving urban growth and preserving rural character as directed by the King County Comprehensive Plan.

The King County Comprehensive Plan emphasizes different treatments for urban and rural areas with the objective of directing future growth and services to designated urban areas and protecting rural character. The urban and rural strategies in the Roads Strategic Plan will help the division plan, design, build, operate, and maintain roads in both urban and rural areas of unincorporated King County in a manner consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Strategies:

- Provide a safe, well-functioning, interconnected arterial road system throughout urban and rural areas.
- Support population density and multi-modal travel in urban areas.
- Coordinate with cities on road needs in potential annexation areas and provide annexation incentives.
- Respond to evolving county transportation needs as unincorporated areas are annexed or incorporate.
- Provide effective rural transportation solutions compatible with limited growth and preservation of rural character.
- Provide road facilities and services that enhance urban and rural communities.
- Communicate with the public about the county's differing approaches to meeting urban and rural transportation needs.

Congestion Management

Goal: Reduce congestion and improve traffic flow.

Traffic congestion occurs when the demand for travel exceeds the capacity of the transportation system to accommodate that travel at an acceptable level of service. Congestion results in lost time, wasted energy, reduced productivity, increased traffic accidents and other incidents, increased air and water pollution, and increased frustration for travelers. All of this adds up to reduced mobility and higher costs to the county, the public, and business.

Strategies to relieve traffic congestion should focus on both the supply side and the demand side. Supply-side improvements include providing additional lane miles, improving operational efficiency, and shifting to multi-user travel modes such as bus and carpool. Demand-side improvements would decrease the number and/or length of trips or shift trips to a less congested time of day. Plan strategies provide guidance for both these aspects of congestion management, using a variety of techniques appropriate to unique situations.

Strategies:

- Take a regional, systems approach to congestion management and transportation planning.
- Develop a congestion management system to help identify and prioritize projects.
- Consider intelligent transportation systems and transportation demand management measures before making operational, intersection, or capacity improvements.
- Direct traffic away from local neighborhoods and onto arterials.
- Coordinate systems analysis and planning for congestion management with other county functions such as Comprehensive Plan updates and Concurrency Management Program.

Transportation Alternatives—Transit, Transportation Demand Management, High Occupancy Vehicle, Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Equestrian

Goals:

- 1. Support transit, high-occupancy vehicle use, and transportation demand management strategies to maximize travel options and manage single-occupancy vehicle use.***
 - 2. Provide bicycle and pedestrian facilities and services that enhance safety and increase mobility options.***
 - 3. Support equestrian travel in equestrian communities designated in the King County Comprehensive Plan, with an emphasis on safety and connection to the regional trail system.***
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Transportation alternatives include the many modes of travel and related activities beyond single-occupancy vehicle travel. The Road Services Division plays a prominent role in providing facilities and strategies that support transportation alternatives. The division works in concert with King County Metro Transit to support public transportation and demand management efforts. High Occupancy Vehicle, or HOV, facilities on county roads are currently limited, but future long-range regional plans, such as Puget Sound Regional Council's *Destination 2030*, call for King County to play a role in supporting the regional core HOV network.

Bicycle and pedestrian facilities are an increasingly important component of the transportation network. The division has a long history of promoting bicycle travel within King County as an alternative to drive-alone commuting as well as a healthy recreational activity. The transportation alternatives strategies recognize the growing importance of providing mobility options and reducing single-occupancy vehicle travel. In addition, recent King County legislation has formalized the division's role in providing equestrian opportunities along roadways in designated equestrian communities to help preserve rural lifestyles and recreational opportunities.

Strategies:

- Coordinate with Metro Transit on capital planning and development, transit signal priority systems, efficiency of transit within key corridors, and transportation demand management measures.
- Provide limited HOV improvements to support the regional core HOV system.
- Develop non-motorized facilities as interconnected networks.
- Design non-motorized facilities to be safe, convenient, well used, and cost effective as guided by local and nationally recognized standards and policies.
- Encourage bicycling and walking as serious means of everyday transportation.
- Facilitate a regional approach to non-motorized facilities and activities.
- Identify critical missing links in the equestrian trail system and provide for equestrian use of the road right-of-way in equestrian communities.
- Retain existing critical equestrian links on division property.
- Ensure that the ideas and concerns of equestrian users are heard by the division.

Maintenance and Preservation of Infrastructure

Goal: Protect mobility and existing infrastructure investments through maintenance and preservation.

Road maintenance and preservation are vital parts of the division's work program. A safe road system, like any capital investment, must be maintained on a regular and timely basis to minimize the life cycle costs and extract the maximum long-term benefit from the investment. A well-maintained road system is crucial to an effective commercial delivery system and to the economic vitality of communities. Roads and bridges left too long without

proper maintenance and timely pavement overlays would need to be rebuilt at a much higher cost.

In addition to the challenges of routine, periodic maintenance and preservation, major storms and other unanticipated events cause disruptions and backlogs. Effective maintenance strategies and actions will help achieve program goals while retaining flexibility to rebalance resources when necessary.

Strategies:

- Optimize infrastructure lifecycle and recognize the relationship between maintenance and Capital Improvement Program development.
- Use a maintenance monitoring and reporting system to support budgeting decisions.
- Minimize the deferral of maintenance due to emergency events.
- Use a programmatic bridge maintenance and replacement system to prevent loss of inventory and maintain bridges as a vital part of the road system.

Roads Safety

Goal: Maintain and improve safety for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other users of King County roads.

Safety on the county's roads is the division's highest priority, consistent with the regional priorities outlined in the Puget Sound Regional Council's *Destination 2030* metropolitan transportation plan and the values voiced by the Roads Strategic Plan community advisory group. While all road projects have safety components, the division also has many specific ongoing road safety efforts and programs. These include response to citizen safety requests, addressing conditions at identified high-accident locations, arterial traffic and safety patrol activities, and neighborhood safety activities and improvements. The following strategies are intended to enhance the already extensive efforts the division employs in support of roads safety by promoting additional oversight of safety-related projects and programs, establishing more uniform guidelines and standards, and specifying where additional efforts would be most effective.

Strategies:

- Continue to provide ongoing safety improvements.
- Have a safety management committee oversee and coordinate safety activities.
- Document the division's safety standards and program goals.
- Enhance traffic and roads safety law enforcement programs.
- Use facilities and landscape buffers to enhance non-motorized safety.
- Ensure safety and operational improvements in new developments.
- Keep safety as a primary consideration in all division activities.

Transportation Environmental Stewardship

Goal: Plan, build, operate, and maintain the road system in a manner that recognizes stewardship of the natural and human-made environments.

While undertaking its core mission to provide efficient and safe transportation facilities, the Road Services Division is committed to complying with all applicable regulations and conducting its business in a manner that is sensitive to and respectful of both the natural environment and the archaeological, historical, and other cultural resources of King County. The division reviews capital improvement projects and maintenance activities for their effect on the environment in compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act and National Environmental Policy Act, and in association with various permit applications.

The environmental stewardship strategies in the Roads Strategic Plan provide additional tools for meeting current and future regulatory requirements and enhance the division's ability to achieve its transportation goals. This is particularly important at a time when federal, state, and local environmental and cultural resource regulations are becoming more complex, the effects of the Endangered Species Act on providing road services remain uncertain, and King County residents continue to voice their desire for a quality environment.

Strategies:

- Proactively plan for the environment to improve project selection, better assess costs and regulatory complexity, and reduce adverse effects on the environment.
- Demonstrate leadership in environmental stewardship consistent with the division's transportation mission.
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental mitigation efforts.
- Ensure consistent and comprehensive environmental compliance.
- Inventory and assess cultural resources to reduce regulatory conflicts and improve road project predictability.
- Protect cultural resources on division property or in areas affected by division activities to the maximum practicable extent.
- Define "historic character" to better guide road development and maintenance in historic areas.

Roads Funding Strategies

Goal: Ensure efficient and cost-effective allocation of resources.

Revenue available for transportation improvements has been declining in recent years due to annexations, incorporations, and voter initiative tax limits. At the same time, costs for many transportation improvements have increased due to development constraints and environmental considerations and requirements. The division has met these financial challenges by improving efficiency. Budget innovations, such as Capital Improvement

Program flexible budgeting and the issuance of road construction bonds, have helped maximize the active use of available revenues. Future budgeting decisions will likely become increasingly difficult unless new and predictable sources of funding are found. The funding chapter of the Road Services Plan includes strategies and actions designed to maximize efficient use of resources and, where possible, secure additional revenues.

Strategies:

- Maximize efficiencies before seeking new revenue sources.
- Seek additional sources of revenue to meet program goals if efficiencies are not sufficient.
- Consider transportation as well as secondary benefits (e.g., environmental or community enhancement) when prioritizing projects.
- Provide flexibility to adjust funding priorities in response to changing circumstances.
- Communicate with the public about capital project status and conditions that affect the selection, timing, and completion of projects.
- Consider operating and Capital Improvement programs together as one overall roads program when setting funding priorities.

Conclusions

The division's business involves a complex balancing act. The county has many high-priority transportation needs and legally mandated responsibilities. Financial resources are limited and must be used to get the biggest "bang for the buck" in terms of service to the public. Legal, regulatory, and other constraints must be anticipated and negotiated when building and maintaining road facilities. The agency attempts to maintain a balanced program within the context of these pressures and to make proactive, well-informed decisions when faced with difficult choices. In essence, Road Services must stay nimble to remain effective and ahead of the curve.

The Roads Strategic Plan expands on and complements the county's Comprehensive Plan by providing new strategic guidance for spending transportation dollars on projects and services to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and other road users. The Road Services Division should approach implementation of the Roads Strategic Plan through the following mechanisms:

- Use the plan to guide revision of the Transportation Needs Report process and creation of a new long-term transportation capital needs plan.
- Implement the plan's strategies and actions in a timely and effective manner through targeted work programs and regular monitoring and reporting of progress.
- Keep the plan current by re-evaluating it at least every four years and updating it to respond to changing circumstances and needs.

The goals, strategies, and actions in the plan, together with the new Transportation Needs Report under development, will prepare the Road Services Division to meet the transportation challenges of today and tomorrow.